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INFLUENCE OF ORIENTAL ART ON MODERN AMERICAN DECORATION.

BY W. L. D. O'GRADY.

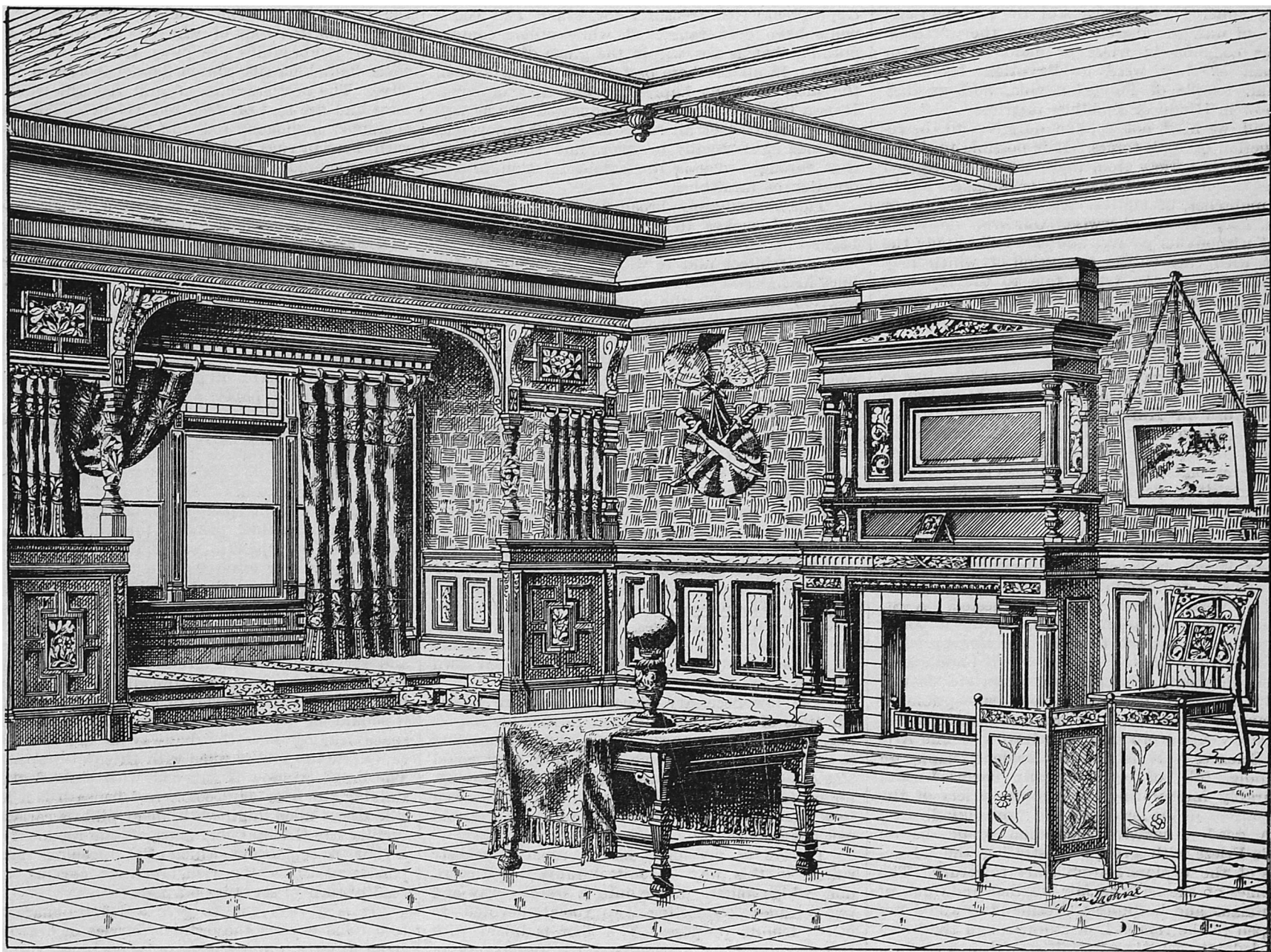
To the peaceful conquest of Japan by American courtesy may directly be traced the introduction of Oriental art into our architecture and corresponding interior decoration. Our old Boston merchants who trafficked with the East long ago adorned their parlors, like their prototypes in Holland, Italy, and Portugal, with "curios" from India and China, but no idea of borrowing from them hints as to form or color for home use ever entered their minds. The packing-box order of architecture, sometimes crudely decorated after the model of a third-class pastry cook's methods, universally prevailed. Interiors were considered superlatively grand when the white and gold, appropriate enough in a Louis-XIV. palace, made a 20 x 30 room, with its profusion of looking-glasses and consoles, glaring carpet with its

results in reproducing styles and conglomerations of styles formerly in vogue. Queen-Anneism and the so-called Colonial boudoir classicism threatened to overwhelm us, but their insufficiency and prettiness have been manifest, and the graceful versatility and adaptability of Oriental art have stepped in the gap to save us from the anachronisms of the Goth or Greek or Roman, and the undeveloped tawdriness of the Renaissance.

The brilliant colors and firm drawing of Japan have led to that sincerest flattery imitation, but the abundant supplies of real Japan work which are sold so cheaply have led us more to adaptation than to slavish imitation. We annex what is suitable to our tastes for our original work, and pass by certain features which do not please us. Our conventionalizing is different, and harmonizes with our usages. We hold to the beauties of color and harmonies of grouping, but neglect the perspective as interpreted by the Japanese, and are beginning to emerge from the angularities of design—appropriate enough for a country where the bamboo is so important a feature of domestic life. We get changeable fun out of *Puck*, or the *Judge*, or *Punch*, or *L'Amusant*, or the *Kladder-*

Cordovan or stamped Spanish leather are imitated with fidelity in paper, and novel designs in the same taste are daily produced by artists who have the gift of creation and are imbued with the very spirit of their Oriental prototypes. Metal work too has been admirably imitated in the boldest relief and with the most lustrous effects in bright and tinted designs.

Several of our newest mansions have Persian smoking or billiard rooms, with walls adorned with the most charming Arabesques, the mantel-pieces and furniture all being carved to correspond with antique Persian tiles in all the brilliant glories of tint, and carpeted with costly rugs of sheen unparalleled. Wooden structures for the amusement of the million at watering places, and brick and marble restaurants and music halls are decorated with the fretwork and gorgeous hues of the villas of the wealthy in Damascus or Tetuan. Orientalism with modern improvements has evidently come to stay. With modifications it is evidently suited to our people. It is manifest even in our dress. The gay colors of our ladies' toilettes, the very arrangement of their drapery, suggest, and often surpass, the Kaleidoscopic



DESIGN FOR DINING-ROOM.

immense and impossible flowers, cornices stuck on like mustard plasters, and walls covered with paper of startling hideousness, resemble at some distance a café on a Parisian Boulevard. Art and architecture were stagnant.

All this has been changed, and art has been brought to bear, sometimes perhaps even too profusely, needing considerable toning down, in the adornment of our dwellings inside and out, in our furniture and domestic utensils, for the poor as well as for the very rich. This revival has not been peculiar to America, or rather to the United States, for other countries, notably England, have been affected by it, and no little influence in bringing about this state of things may be claimed by the numerous International and Minor Expositions of the last thirty-three years and the great increase in pleasure and business travel which has made "globe trotting" as little unusual among mankind generally as a pilgrimage to Mecca has been since the Hegira for good Mohammedans.

As is natural in such a revival there has been considerable confusion. Without any settled canons of art appropriate for modern needs, we have experimented with somewhat heterogeneous

datsch, and do not reproduce the stereotyped grins of Japanese grotesques so suggestive of Gothic gargoyles or monkish illuminations in Medieval missals.

Tired of this grotesque and bizarre element of Japanese and Chinese art, it was natural that relief should be found in other Oriental styles where harmony of color is equally pronounced, but where form is subdued to more accord with our notions. The Moresque styles have been steadily growing on us. The markets of the East have been ransacked for the fruit of ancient and modern looms, for arms and armor, for rugs and carpets and elaborately carved furniture, for brass-work and beautiful portières, for jewels and enamels. Stucco, so long neglected, has resumed its prominence as an economical and beautiful medium for decoration and, with American ingenuity, we have hit on substitutes and improvements on stucco such as Lincrusta-Walton, which now-a-days gives the trim yacht an elegance unsurpassed by the barge of Cleopatra, and can give a grace to a boudoir unexcelled by the superb chambers of the Alhambra itself.

The tapestry hangings and wall coverings of

charms of those far eastern crowds which travelers used to talk about. And these gay habits need the congruity of appropriate surroundings. The sombre rectangularity of a New England village of twenty years ago, with its white wooden houses, and windows with green shutters, and interior walls disfigured with poisonous arsenical misrepresentations of vegetable matter, have been practically reformed off the face of the earth.

There is one great advantage in Oriental art. It can be varied indefinitely and thus need never be tiresome. The eye will become fatigued with classic forms, or even with the more elastic but still limited Gothic, but the geometrical base of Oriental decoration is as susceptible of innumerable changes as arithmetical figures themselves. And it is in harmony with western ideas. The architect of that wondrous Taj Mahal at Agra that "dream in marble" was an Italian, and its interior decoration is as conspicuously chaste as the exterior. It is a marqueterie of jewels. The founder and architect of the Martinieré and Imâm-Bara at Lucknow was a French adventurer in the service of the Great Mogul. No two rooms are alike, and all are beautiful, quite equal to the

finest remains of the Moors at Seville or Granada, and the stucco, formed of the finest shell lime, has acquired by age the hardness and mellow beauty of enamel. Our own artists have found no difficulty in acclimatizing Oriental art.

And there are yet other mines of beauty to be delved in which have as yet been unexplored or at least unworked. Spain, Moorish in much of its art, Morocco itself, Turkey, Persia, India, China and Japan have all been drawn on for samples and examples and are more or less known to us, but we have neglected Siam and Burmah and Annam. Siamese princes have visited us, but the products of Siamese industry are as yet practically unknown except to the very few.

Probably the French adventures among those distant peoples may lead to our better and more general acquaintance with their quaint pottery, embroidery, lacquer and metal work. They have a character all their own, full of suggestiveness to the cosmopolitan workman.

Mohammedans are forbidden by their religion to represent anything in the heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth. This restriction compelled the development of beauty in color and geometrical form. The Shiaks among the Persians and Cashmerees have less rigidly adhered to the tenets of the prophet; and scenes of war, the chase, the harem, the workshop are as common in frieze or dado in Shiraz or Ispahan as they were in Egyptian tombs or Grecian temple or Pompeian villa, and as they are now in Hindu or Buddhist interiors.

And we need not confine ourselves to the reproduction of such topics. It is possible to devise an agreeable variety from the decoration involved in the use of Benares plaques or Japanese storks and umbrellas, of motives foreign to us in age or clime, classical or otherwise. Our own daily life is not without its poetry, and can well supply the artist with themes, the expression of which may in some distant day tell a tale to the mythical New Zealander of the future when the tall towers of the *Tribune*, Produce Exchange, and Roebling's Bridge have become ancient ruins.

One of the most charming rooms in India is a square drawing-room in Madras, which has a frieze of figures, in the flowing garments and vivid colors worn in Hindustan, engaged in all the various industries of that land of hand labor, frescoed by a young officer who had been taken with the animated little tale pictures of Trichinopoly, exquisitely painted in miniature with body colors and bronze powders. It is an album of every-day occupations, lively, varied, and thoroughly decorative.

Let it not, however, be understood that any too realistic representation of the modern pursuits of western civilization is suggested. A St. Patrick's Day procession would be highly unpoetic and, indeed, a subject to make angels weep. But the idealizing of the advances in handicrafts, steam, electricity, the printing press, etc., is certainly not only permissible, but susceptible of enchanting treatment. A most charming frieze has lately been produced illustrating "The Arts and Sciences." It is rich in incident, happy in grouping, full of spirit, highly idealized, and admirably interpreting an endless variety of the occupations of modern man and womankind.

A good decorative suggestion would be an Arctic Frieze with groups illustrating the adventures of the explorers from start to return. The costumes of the navy in fair weather and foul, of Esquimaux and hospitable Greenlanders would not be open to the reproach of stiffness, and the hunting, sledging, camping, festivities, sickness, rescues, etc., would furnish incident in interesting variety. The followers of Nimrod in all ages would be a noble subject for treatment in the hall of a country house or shooting box.

Individuality, grace, and harmony of design are requisite now-a-days in furniture, floor, ceiling or wall coverings, and thanks to the progress of invention, even people of very moderate means can now surround themselves with objects of beauty that the merchant princes of the old Genoese or Venetian Republics would have envied and paid fabulous sums for.

TASTE IN FURNISHING.

BY MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

A HAPPY sign of the time is that the growth of taste is gaining steadily on our desire for luxury. The more we find delight in forms and colors, the less stress we lay upon values that can be computed in dollars and cents. Aesthetics are in fact among the great levelers of the world since they bring people of all conditions upon a common plane of enjoyment.

One of the first things important to learn by proper ambitions of beautiful homes is that the outlay of money is not the principal consideration. Almost every one admires the surroundings of an artist, but this is not because he has expended a fortune in them, but because they have been brought together with a sense of unity and harmony, for which the tradesmen's bills can offer no receipt. This is not the faintest suggestion that our homes for every-day wear should resemble artists' studios. That would be plagiarism of the worst sort. But only that something corresponding to the artist's mental attitude should underlie the taste and pleasure of furnishing.

It is impossible to give an infallible recipe for fitting up a house. In fact, the chief difficulty has hitherto been that we have been striving for a formula, and have made the same approach to it in furnishing that we have made in architecture, as so many miles of weary streets and commonplace interiors testify. One may find, however, some starting points worth consideration, and the advance from these may result at least in individual expression which of itself is worth more or less.

Recently I have gone through a number of noteworthy interiors, some of which are made resplendent with treasures for which two continents have been ransacked, while others contain nothing that is not within the grasp of moderate means. In all of these best worthy of attention, the most constant impression was that of color. It is a trite fact that the uneducated eye as well as the educated of all forms of artistic enjoyment responds most readily to color, and this suggests that through color is the easiest solution of the question of furnishing.

This immediately broadens the sense of the term, and makes the taste of the householder begin with the bare walls, unless he has confidence in his architect and is willing to follow in the lines he has laid down. For it may be confidently asserted that with the walls satisfactorily treated the furnishing proper becomes an easy task.

One may take as a case in point the drawing-room of the house of Mr. Henry Hiliard. The wood work is mahogany richly inlaid with white mahogany, and is lavishly present in columns and panels. The wall hangings are of embroidered silks of the same tints. The floor is laid with the two woods, and the cornice carries the two colors into the cream and gold of the ceiling. A warm subtle tone, resultant of the two colors, bathes the room and the room seems almost furnished before the furniture proper is reached.

Any one at all sensitive to color, instinctively supplies in imagination all that is necessary to complete the room. The wall hangings require no pictures. The inlaid panels above the mantels are sufficient unto themselves. The white onyx mantels will suffer a few pieces of color in harmony with the tone of the room to accent their own delicacy.

The few necessary pieces of furniture repeat the tints of the room, but their further identity is lost. The room composes like a picture according to a certain color scheme. But how easy could this color impression have been mixed by dragging, for example, into the room a luxuriously carved teak wood cabinet, a Florentine table, and an old oak Jacobean chair.

I have in my mind now a room hopelessly ruined in this way. Architecturally, it is a corridor, which pillars divide into a passage-way and two arcades, connecting two rooms devoted to other definite purposes. The floor is inlaid with mosaics of Sienna marble, and the pillars are of the same marble. The wall hangings of velours and gold continue the same tints to the vaults, which are ornamented in gold and the tympana filled with mural paintings of great beauty. The salient feature of the room is of course its delicate color, which deepens into greater luxuriance in the ceiling. But behold, the form of the room is destroyed by heavy ebony cabinets placed corner-wise. The delicate floor is covered with a gay French carpet which rises up to meet you on entering the room. The luxurious furniture is of yellow satin utterly missing the tint, and made further obnoxious by machine embroidery. In the face of all this, one's vision is held in horrid fascination and the glory of the ceiling utterly lost.

All things being equal, one prefers rich materials, marble, bare woods, plush, and gold. The charm of color however exists independently of these. I have in my mind a small parlor that on entering one always has the sensation of ease and genial warmth, for colors create states of feeling and possess in this way power to please and to annoy. The ingrain carpet has melting tones of brown, yellow and red. The wall paper, which did not cost more than ten cents a roll, losing the yellow curry, the browns and red up to the lighter frieze

and are lost in the plain warm brown gray of the ceiling. The portières are of soft tints of red, the wood work is painted in light brown in which some red is felt. The furniture is of the simplest description, but responds always to some personal want. There are well chosen engravings, on an easel is an excellent water color of deep hued roses, and against a closet door a broad Japanese rendering of pheasants among peonies. The catalogue of detail, however, cannot make apparent the charm of color. But one cannot emphasize too frequently that it is in every one's grasp.

Another way of using color is by contrasts. This is more difficult and requires greater courage in the hands of the uninitiated, since it is necessary to use colors of the same value, however widely the tints differ. Suppose a room, in illustration of the boldest use of color. The wood work is painted red, not too dark, and in which there is a perceptible tinge of yellow. The walls are covered with Japanese chintz with a small gold figure on an ecru ground. The cornice introduces Indian blue, red, and gold, leading into the ceiling tinted a light yellow pink, in which the brush marks are very apparent, and, instead of being defects in execution, give a sense of lightness and air, the color being very thin that lifts the low ceiling. The window draperies are of blue denim, the tone of which is admirable. The mantel lambrequins are olive velours, the table cover light blue silk canton flannel bordered with olive. The portières are of dull red, the window seats and fire seat of deep red velours. The floor is stained mahogany red and is partially covered with Persian rugs and a white bearskin mat. A black ebonized cabinet is on the wall. There is a mahogany escritoire, a Chippendale table, a yellow sofa, a willow chair, and a Boston rocker made luxurious with cushions. Nothing, it will be seen, is despised in this room which harmonizes, and the effect, for the room is veritable, enlists every one's attention and admiration.

I have recently seen an apartment in which the wood work throughout was painted a dark blue-green with gold in the hollows of the moldings. But every room was different. In one the wall hangings were of gold chintz, in another a warm light olive paper, and in still another deep red wall paper—these papers giving the suggestion which the furnishing of the rooms carried out. Gold, it may be said, is the great reconciler, and its use especially in darker corners and in shadow cannot be too lavish.

A good starting point for the furnishing of a room is a cherished piece of furniture, a picture, or some other object to which the room shall be subservient. For example, in a room with which I am familiar is an Oriental painting, a landscape with figures in which the local color is strong. This is placed as a panel in the wall. Corresponding panels are filled with tea chest matting gilded, and serving as the background for a profusion of vines and flowers painted broadly in yellows and browns with a few dashes of more vivid color, for it should be said its occupant is an artist. The space leading into the hallway is divided into tumuli arches and is filled with Oriental draperies. The broad window is screened with stained glass, staining the floor with color, and beneath is a low silk divan filled high with huge pillows carrying further the Oriental character of the room. This is but a suggestion which the ingenious mind possessing something rich, rare, or curious, can readily turn to serve its purpose.

It is always well to give a definite character to a room beyond the ordinary service of drawing-room, library, dining-room, or what not. Having settled on the background, by which must be understood the floor, walls, and ceiling add only those pieces of furniture which the nature of the room demands. Choose these for their form. A chair, for example, well constructed, is a possession for a life time. The covering may be renewed from time to time and is easily brought into relation with the prevailing color of the room. There are few people that do not consider cost in furnishing, so that it may be set down in the division of funds to devote the greater sum to the construction, is sound wisdom. Upholstering may be done in the house by skillful journeymen, and I have seen most attractive work done by the mistress and maids in cushions of Oriental bath towels judiciously fastened with ribbons.

Great distance toward furnishing fitly is traversed when it has been learned that a profusion of bric-a-brac does not tend that way. Bric-a-brac has its reasonable place, yea, even china ornaments, and porcelain dogs. But it is not for example on the slab of a bureau where one cannot find room to lay down a brush, or on slender legged tables in crowded drawing-rooms. But this is a subject too large to enter upon, and one can only say of this, and finally of the subject at large, the most potent aid is common sense.